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A SOUTHERN POET.¹

WE have heard much of the New South, and of a Southern literary awakening. Who of us has not? And some, perhaps, are skeptical, while others are equally enthusiastic at the mere suggestion of the subjects; yet few are willing to take the trouble needed to prove how far they are mere hollow terms, or names for solid and sound realities, with power to act and react, and so to create a heritage for Americans yet unborn.

It is not without a kind of loving curiosity that a Southerner in heart approaches the work of some new poet of the South. He cuts the pages and glances up and down them, with a feverish eagerness he does not care to acknowledge even to himself. The wounded self-respect of a noble people needs healing. Manufactures and industrial enterprises offer dubious consolation; their benefits at best are prospective, and their presence, to be quite frank, is troublesome. Worsted in material ways, the soul would be proud of some signal victory in the sphere of moral or artistic achievement. If the South be democratic, it is so in a way quite different from that of the puritanic North. The idea of inherent distinction, of aristocratic precedence is not dead. If representation of the people was ever acceptable, as the successor of caste rule, it was because the well-born Southerner never doubted but that he would be the representative. Rightly believing in the worth of heritage and breeding, he perceived his permanent advantage in a democratic government, so long as its representatives and rulers were to be chosen for their merit and executive ability. The Southerner did not ignore the fact that genius of all kinds is the will-o'-the-wisp that will adhere to no steady lines of descent; but he regarded

¹ *Days and Dreams, Poems*, by Madison Cawein. G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York and London. 1891. *Moods and Memories, Poems*, by Madison Cawein. G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York and London. 1891.

the low-born genius as a phenomenon altogether exceptional. At bottom he was as aristocratic as the high-born Englishman; perhaps more so, since forced more often into a belligerent, defensive attitude towards the levelling tendencies, those efforts to reduce humanity to a "divine average", so hostile to his own just pre-eminence, and the perpetuated dominion of his peers.

We are not prepared to censure the typical well-born Southerner of bygone days for views like these. We realize what there is in breeding. Still, let us observe, we do not value breeding for its own sake, but for what there may be in it. The aristocrat is only too likely to assume the existence of good qualities, when the fact of good ancestry is known. He will be tempted to feign them where they are not. The unprejudiced man, on the contrary, realizing that a tree must be judged by the fruit it bears, will prefer to judge of ancestry by the qualities made evident in the actual present; for, be it remembered, ancestry is not only ancient or recent, but can be excellent or bad. All have an equally ancient ancestry; the difference lies in the antiquity of records. The true worth of excellent ancestry is the likelihood it suggests of excellency in the future, and the consequent self-respect it inspires which aids in checking divagation of conduct and perverse desires. It is a fatal possession when instead of self-respect it fills a man with self-complacency, so that he regards himself as too lofty for the contamination of low contacts—as inviolable, invulnerable and perfect—as though the noble ghosts of ancestors ennobled an individually degraded man by taking up their abode in the heart of his conceit. These are commonplaces, which everybody knows, but no one heeds in practice, and they quite plainly indicate the danger to which the well-bred Southerner was formerly exposed. He felt himself above literature; above any pursuit that demanded exertion, unless by chance it smacked of feudal times—as, for the man in private life, the care of independent estates with their dependents, and the chase in all its forms; for the man inclined to be patriotic, the

army, and the wielding of great political forces in national affairs.

To-day, who shall speak boldly what the dangers are that threaten? Be it whose duty it may, it surely is not that of the literary critic. His patriotic part is to study faithfully, lovingly, but with keen discrimination the artistic efforts of his contemporaries; to signalize their advent; to help them to an audience by dispelling unjust prejudice; and, on the other hand, his solemn duty is to utter candidly a judgment which shall be no deduction from conventional canons of criticism, but a sincere account of what he, the critic, felt as reader, that so the author, in his turn, may have some notion of what his work effects. Nor should the critic hide himself—his faults and limitations—behind a mystifying, magisterial *We*; making pretense, as it were, to ubiquitousness, omniscience and perfect fairness. No man is without bias. Individual judgments, then, are valuable only as their bias is known, and capable of being accounted for by the reader who peruses them to weigh them for himself. Thus, by a frank self-revelment, painful though it may often be, the critic does his work most faithfully. He, too, like the poet, has to dip his pen in his own life-blood, and write with a living ink still warm, and fluently too, lest it should thicken—lest he should become a devotee to some pet theory, to the rust of his own brain.

Now, as said before, the Southerner in sympathies cannot open a new volume of verse by a Southern author without feeling far more anxiety than he is quite willing to admit. The fear lest he cannot praise, without reserve of any sort; lest this voice of the South he hoped for, should want in sweetness, in vigor, in noble seriousness and beautiful severity, in ease of utterance and individuality of tone. A Southern voice should be Southern; not merely should the names of Southern growths of nature and society be often heard. A photographic camera has no right to the name of *Southern* because it takes Southern landscapes and faces; it remains forever unaffected by the quality of what it sees

and serves to reproduce. A poem is not a Southern poem, because, forsooth, it tells us of cotton fields and fence riders; of mules and darkies; of cape jessamines, japonicas, magnolias; of stretches of calm water walled in by luxuriant swamp; of mosses that trail from hoary boughs; of herons and the quiver of summer heat. What makes a poet Southern, is that the tone of his voice caresses these objects, or objects foreign to his land, in a characteristically Southern way; the blood of his style is Southern; and though he may feed on the poetic products of all climes, on Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne; on Hugo, de Musset, Beaudelaire; on Goethe, Uhland, Schiller, Heine;—on all fruits without distinction, he rejects what does not suit him, and transmutes as nutriment whatever suits him, into genuinely Southern blood and brawn. But the test of thorough assimilation is to be sought in the absolute disappearance of the distinctive nature of each influence, the total loss even of the entire chorus of influences, in the rich, individual, dominant voice of the profiter by all—the nourished, vigorous utterer in ways his very own of what is ever the common heritage of artistic souls. This is the mark of mastership. The imitator, the duplicator, the improver,—these are not the kings and conquerors of letters. They are courtiers at the best; that is to say, either princes, future kings under age, apprentices who learn their craft of greatness, or princelings in perpetual tutelage, who can never in their turn become centres of a court.

Still, be it observed that a poet, while a living, individual, national voice need not speak out the grievances, or chant the glories of the present. He may prefer the office of historian, of embalmer to a perished past. He may be a prophet crying from a lofty table-land of vision to the multitudes below, announcing the unrisen sun. It is not the place of the critic, but of mankind at large to settle which of these offices is noblest. Each has its unquestionable worth; each in its proper place is supremely what we want.

Now it becomes incumbent upon us to state whether or

not the work of Mr. Cawein is an utterance of the New South. I believe we can boldly declare that it is not. It does not have the marks of its spirit; it is not filled with the poet's anxiety to have been born in future times. There is not in it the love of the eager piercer into the yet unseen. His faith, so far as it is made apparent, is not the substance, nor is his work so far as published the substantiation of things hoped for; rather is it a spell that calls back to momentary life and glow the ghost of things regretted. Not that Mr. Cawein alludes to the old state of affairs; perhaps ante bellum days are too painfully remembered to be summoned before the footlights by his art; perhaps again they are a part of a dead past. We are not discussing what Mr. Cawein's personal attitude is, but whether his poetry looks forward or backward, is prophetic or historic in temperament, will appeal most to the pioneer of a great democracy, or to the survivor of the aristocratic civilization of Europe transplanted in America.¹ His choice of subjects, and the manner of treating them reveals a luxurious joy in the remote past. Greece, and her gracious fictions, the Middle Ages with their awful gloom and equally awful splendors, occupy his imagination so entirely, that we cannot fancy, as we muse through "Moods and Memories", dwelling on single lines, losing ourselves in mazes of blossoming word-gardens, or wandering down bright meadows of soft sound—cannot easily

¹It should be noted, perhaps, when we say Mr. Cawein's work is unamerican and unsouthern, that we have not failed to notice his attempt in "One Day and Another" to write a Kentuckian love story. We commend the good intent, but cannot say that we regard the series of poems a success. Far from that. A series is always exposed to the danger of containing poor poems, serving as connectives between fair poems, whilst only now and then, perhaps, there is a real gem. Besides being rough and unequal in execution, hardly redeeming itself by occasional music, the story is not peculiarly poetical, nor is it peculiarly American or modern in the ideas of love and life that underlie it. The flora of the poems, and the fauna are Kentuckian, the fence-rails and the camp-meeting; but the spirit of the whole is essentially the old conventional one, with now and then perhaps a slight lack of refinement, due no doubt to a faint admixture of new ideas, harmonizing ill with the old, and thus producing jars that displease, though they are not violent enough to shock.

believe that we are in America, that both the poet and we, the readers, belong to a nation palpitant with a vital future, bearing like Atlas the burden on its shoulders—the colossal burden of the social and political hopes of man. We read poem after poem, and everywhere it is the same:

In the vales Auloniads,
On the mountains Oreads,
On the leas Leimoniads,
Naked as the stars that glisten;
Pan, the Satyrs, Dryades,
Fountain-lovely Naiades,
Foam-lipped Oceanides,
Breathless mid their seas or trees,
Stay and stop and look and listen.

—*Moods and Memories*, p. 130.

And this quotation, let it be said, by the way, is taken from a poem entitled the "Limnad"—a vigorous piece of verse-making, to pay it the least tribute it deserves. But to return to the point under discussion. If we are not favored by the passing in the foreground of some Greek deity, or semi-deity, it is

An elf who rowels his spiteful bay,
Like a mote on a ray, away, away;
An elf who saddles the hornet lean
To din i' the ear o' the swinging bean;
Who hunts with hat cocked half awry
The bottle-blue o' the dragon fly.

—*Days and Dreams*, p. 17.

And we confess we are delighted for a time by such pretty banter.

When, as happens many times, the poet is not dealing directly with Greek myths or the Faery world, but with some scene of rural life—as in "The Berriers," "Harvesting," "Going for the Cows," or some mere description for description's sake, as in "By Wold and Wood"—we have everything seen through an atmosphere of mythology, every nod of bough or toss of grass in the wind, every spot of sun or dash of gloom in the landscape is a beck, a defiance, a smile or a frown of some hid spirit, not from Olympus, to be sure—for

our poet does not care so much for the golden houses of the gods—but from the hills and dales of pagan Hellas. Now we are not prepared to say that a poet in the nineteenth century does wrong to be twenty-four centuries behind his times in his way of looking at the world of man and nature; only we should feel quite justified in asserting that his work is not quite what is most wanted by his serious contemporaries. And if, in truth, he does not, as man, look at nature with the eyes of a Greek, it is a pity that he should, as a poet, wear a mask; a pity for several reasons:—first, because his work will be neither ancient nor modern, and so, interesting only as a phantastic combination of contemporary feelings with out-grown symbols and manners of belief; and then, because he can never be thought to be very seriously an artist, very much in earnest as a man—since, if he felt strongly enough the passions and pains and peace of the hour, he would seek for them a modern guise of expression, putting the new wine in new bottles, and not repelling by the sham of cobwebs those who are thirsty for sharp, fresh vintage; and furthermore, negatively, because, if he has talents which we respect, he owes them to the living present. And here we cannot help but speak a word to American poets in general. It is well enough for the singer of a finished civilization to warble melodiously in some sweet dingle—to forget utterly, himself, his fellow men and the necessities of the hour. It is well enough for William Morris, perhaps—though we understand it least in him—to call himself a “singer of a latter day,” as though what the listener wanted were a sweet potion of oblivion only, instead of strength and inspiration, faith in man and God through the persuading agency of perfect beauty in living art. Have we not our ugly, crude civilization into which to breathe a soul? Are we not heart-sick and aghast at the proportions material life is taking, and the superciliousness of the fleshly, and the dwindling courage of the spiritual in our democratic world? Has the poet no work in the present, that he turns his eye to the past? Did the Greek poet do this? Surely

not. He was singing to the present of the present, and, later, to an old man of his boyhood, to Athens of the heroic days of Troy. His purpose was plain. To delight, and delighting to inspire, and inspiring to be the faithful priest of Pan, of Bacchus, or Apollo, of universality, of inspiration, of beauty and of light.

But then what becomes of our perpetual argument—"Collins? Keats?" The answer, we think, is quite as laconic—"Collins! Keats!" If they did their work, need we surpass it? And, besides, did they, excellent as was their poetry, become leaders of mankind? Did they give us new courage to wage our every-day battles? Particularly Keats? Do we feel sure that our humdrum world seems lovelier thanks to him? Has he not provided a refuge for the heart-sick, the disabled and the hopeless, rather than braced his fellow-men for their terrible war with material and spiritual ugliness, rather than given them the required faith and force to carry their ideals out of the realm of faded metaphors and jaded personifications into the solid, level world of work and struggle and wrong and filth and weariness and death?

Or again it might be argued, the old myths may be made to unfold their hidden meanings, which meanings are as fresh as ever. The possibility of this we grant. No less a genius than Goethe tried it in his Second Part of Faust; and yet compare its circle of awed readers, to that which is held spell-bound by the virile power of the First Part.

Before leaving this subject, let us observe that some of these Greek poems of Mr. Cawein are excellent, notably in *Moods and Memories*—"The Dead Oread," "The Limnad," and many passages up and down describing sirens or mermaids, particularly in the poem entitled "In Mythic Seas." "Artemis" is a piece of conscientious word-painting, though stronger in details than as a whole, and one might say that now and then the march of the poem is somewhat clogged by the very words.

From the "Limnad" we cannot resist quoting another stanza which describes her song:

Soft it comes as sighs in dreams;
 Tears that fall in burning streams;
 Then a sudden burst of beams,
 Beams of song that soar and wrangle,
 Till the woods are taken quite,
 And red stars are waxen white;
 Lilies tall, bent left and right
 Gasp and die with very might
 Of the serpent notes that strangle.

Having signalized sufficiently the unnational character of Mr. Cawein's poetry, we feel bound to state without favor or disfavor, simply with the candor of an annalist, that we were often momentarily charmed and yet sorry for our poet to hear familiar voices through him. We will not say that he is quite conscious how he has lent himself to other poets, who speak through him as a medium lends himself ostensibly to be the mouth-piece of disembodied spirits; yet we are inclined to think that Mr. Cawein loves these master spirits, and remembering his days of apprenticeship too vividly, yields far too humble a submission; that he does not boldly leap up to equality with them in his own esteem, and hence is often content to remember, reproduce, rival their work, and improve on it if possible, instead of calling them, as Browning did when he undertook *Sordello*, to be spectators of his own achievements.

Vanishing visions, whose lineaments steal into slumbers
 Loosened the lids of the sight the night that encumbers;
 Secretly, sweetly with fingers of fog that were slow,
 Slow as a song that mysterious
 Passions the soul, till delirious.

Oh, for the music of moonbeams that master and sweep
 Chords of the resonant deep!
 Smiting loud lyres of night, sonorous as fire,
 Leap fluttering fingers of vanquishing flash and of flake

 Vibrating vested in garments of woven desire.

Here we surely have the ghost of Sidney Lanier; fragments of some unpublished poem, some study tossed aside after the completion of his noble "*Hymns of the Marshes.*" We

feel obliged to apologize for quoting this passage, since it comes from an earlier volume of Mr. Cawein,¹ but as we shall have occasion to quote admiringly later on from the same volume we cannot be thought unjust.

Let us read two stanzas of "Moonrise"—*Moods and Memories*, p. 82—allowing ourselves to be borne along by their rhythm:

And soon from her waist with a slipping
And shudder and clinging of light,
With a loos'ning and pushing and ripping
Of the sable-laced bodice of Night,
With a silence of feet and a dripping
The wonder came, virginal white.

And the air was alive with the twinkle
And tumult of silver-shod feet,
The hurling of stars, and the sprinkle
Of loose, lawny limbs, and a sweet
Murmur and whisper and tinkle
Of beam-weaponed moon-spirits fleet. (!)

Again let us drag out emphatically—taking in all their music—the first couple of stanzas from "The Indian Summer." (*Moods and Memories*, p. 162.)

The dawn is a warp of fever,
The eve is a woof of fire;
And the month is a singing weaver
Weaving a red desire.

With stars Dawn dices with Even,
For the rosy gold they heap
On the blue of the day's deep heaven,
On the black of the night's gray deep.

Are we in error when we cry out "Swinburne"? Have we done our poet a great injustice?

But to wave Tennyson, whose influence we believe can be distinctly felt in the manner of "Orlando"—a strong poem—and to wave Browning, who we think is answerable for many of the rugged negligencies and perversities of style in "One Day and Another," for such expressions as the following:—

¹ *Accolon of Gaul*. Louisville: John P. Morton & Co. 1889.

This could not be on earth; *the flesh that clothes the soul of me. . . .*
and—

You have seen the bright spots in my cheeks
Grow hectic, *as before comes night blood dyes the sunset's streaks?*

or the ghastly wording of these lines:—

Ah, anyhow, my anodyne is this—to feel that you
Are near me, that your *healthy hand soothes mine's unhealthy dew.*

To wave entirely these potent masters, whose influence for good or ill was to be expected, must be marked on any poet using the English language, unless gifted with a far more than ordinary sturdiness of individuality, is not to acquit our author from our charge of unfortunate discipleship. We have still to notice the frequently disastrous influence of Keats, that sweetest of sweet singers, after whom poets run mad in these our days, aping his attitudes of mind, and turns of phrase and rhythm, instead of yielding him their humblest worship, prudently avoiding all imitations of the inimitable, all trespassing on ground he has made sacred to himself by the prints of the golden sandals of his song.

Still we are inclined to say that many of Mr. Cawein's happiest expressions and most poetical lines are to be found in pieces inspired directly by Keats, and of these the reader will have an opportunity to judge a little further on in this paper. Of course Mr. Cawein is quite aware that "To Autumn" is closely modelled after the Ode by Keats which all of us know half by heart. He will not be angry with us for preferring the latter, nor can he resent our saying that we regret his having published what, clever though it be, and beautiful by lines, must seem to any candid reader a useless expansion of a borrowed idea, a provoking variation on a lovely theme:—

I oft have met thee, Autumn, wandering
Beside a misty stream, thy locks blown wild,
Thy cheeks a hectic flush, more fair than Spring,
As if on thee the crimson copse had smiled.

Or thee I've seen a twisted oak beneath,
 Thy gentle eyes with foolish weeping dim,
 Beneath a gnarled oak from whose red leaves
 Thou woundedst drowsy wreaths, while the soft breath
 Of Morn did kiss thy hair and make it swim
 Far out behind, brown as the rustling sheaves.
 Thee have I oft upon a hillock seen,
 Dream-visaged, all agaze at glimpses faint
 Of glimmering woods, that glanced the hills between,
With Indian faces from thy airy paint (!)
 —From "To Autumn," *Moods and Memories*, p. 58.

That in his earlier volumes,¹ poems of an imitative nature should have appeared would surprise no one; that however we are allowed to meet with so many in *Moods and Memories* unless they be accounted for by the second half of the title (viz.: Memories), we cannot but regret, for the poet's sake. It is not well to take one's reader too much into one's confidence. The secrets of the workshop should remain secrets. The man who can echo perfectly, is likely to be thought echoing even when he is singing his own songs—and that Mr. Cawein has such to sing, and has already sung a few we wish to affirm as strongly as we can.

Before we expand upon this affirmation, however, let us hasten to bring our last indictments against him. Bound up, we believe, with his allegiance to a luxuriant sensuousness of form, proceeding from it directly, is a violent disregard for the natural pause at the close of lines. Afraid apparently lest his rich melodies should prove monotonous, he is eager to shock us, every now and then, by some piece of wilful harshness. That the end of a line imposes a slight pause is evident. That this pause should regularly coincide with a grammatical pause seems highly undesirable. That, however, the pause does exist for the reader, we do not doubt at all, and as long as it does, the poet must plan the contents of his lines so that a pause there will not disturb the music of his poem, much less destroy it utterly:—

¹*Accolon of Gaul and other Poems*, Louisville: John P. Morton, 1889.
Lyrics and Idyls, Louisville: John P. Morton, 1890.

And the harvester, white
Morning, reaps them with light.

The vagabond in flowers reminded of
Decay that comes to slay in open love.

Under strange stars, and a slim
Moon in the graveyard grim.

To the burial plot's unknown
Grave with the grayest stone.

Perhaps in all four instances just given, certainly in the last two, it can be pleaded that the disregard of the verse-ending serves to italicize as it were the word which begins the second line, or the last one of the first; by artificially creating a rhetorical pause between "white" and "morning," "reminded of" and "decay," "slim" and "moon," "unknown" and "grave." It makes their relations emphatic.

Its coming days, their many
Trials by morn and night,

is an instance of the best possible use of "enjambement." Still, not infrequently we find—particularly in "One Day and Another"—cases which seem to be mere perversities or negligencies of the author.

We would also enter a protest against inversions as a rule, particularly those that seem to proceed from the mere tradition of the Latin classics, or the devices to which a poet is driven in seeking a rhyme. An inversion always serves to complicate expression, and so to make it less effective. It can be tolerated only when the inevitable loss in simplicity is fully compensated for by a gain in beauty or music, which could have been got in no other way.

The elastic veins through her heart that beat.

A sworded fay
The chestnut's buds into blooms that rips;

are examples of an ugly variety which is not uncommon.

And I must lie awake and think
Of her with such regrets as gladly
No unrebuking conscience shrink;

is rendered by the inversion difficult, and, may we not add, ungrammatical or unbeautiful—according to the meaning given to “shrink”?

When inversion comes together with the use of nouns as verbs, or verbs as nouns, the reader is often puzzled quite a little, and of course the poem suffers. It is of no use to blame the reader. He is inexorable. The poet is the loser, not the reader, in the end.

Last of all let us remark that our poet's attention is fixed too much on the details of his material, and hence he often fails to draw a steady clear-cut outline. This and that attracts us as we read, the pre-eminence of this or that line; but a united, solid appeal as of a compact, self-sufficient whole, imbued with superabundant vitality, is rarely made by a poem of Mr. Cawein's. He is too fond of detailed elaboration, arabesques and fringing, to be often genuinely lyrical, heart-piercing. And, to his justice be it said, he has not often tried to be this. But even in his narratives, and constantly in his descriptive poems, he does not seem to view his material from a sufficiently dominant height to muster the details he has caressed and flattered into independence, under the stringent discipline of his master idea. The result is often bewilderment, which if not always unpleasant, is not just what the poem was intended to produce.

Besides this detailed elaboration is more a matter of language than of thought. Some verse writers of our times indeed make it their task to juggle with words, to create sweet-sounding phrases of more or less meaning, and then to put them together in a mosaic that has no general design, or build them up into some huge structure devoid of architectural purpose, which crumbles and crashes as fast as it rises from the ground. But Keats, who is to be held responsible for this disease, is also its best physician. He who in “Endymion” piled simile on simile, and led us through pathless labyrinths of rhyme, ended by producing perfect poems, as marvellous for their contents, as for what they do not contain; richly full yet chastely self-restrained. Unfortunately

our poet has not the unerring tact of Keats. Leigh Hunt, who often suggests so vividly the very flavor of Keats, goes not infrequently astray—as in—

The dear *lumpish* baby
Humming with the May bee,
Hails us with his bright stare stumbling through the grass.

The sensuous delight in Keats was kept under by his fine perception of the fact that the beautiful demands a checking, often, of sense-pleasure. Leigh Hunt enjoyed the baby's *lumpishness*, and marred therefore an exquisite poem with the most admirable self-complacency. "Tumbling spry"; "fussy runnel;" "where the moss is mussed;" "plushy cheeks red-berried by the breeze;" "night, moon-eyeballed;" "the thickest cream of beauty;" "white-skinned spring;" "he hath tipped the buxom beauty, and gotten her hug and her kiss;" "eyelashes teary;" "fruitful hips;" "bleaching rays;" "your glowing bust;" and their numerous kith and kin, seem to us unfortunate expressions, and we trust Mr. Cawein will pardon our frankness. The epithet hunter is always in danger of snaring a wrong combination. The lover of syrupy alliterations is apt to misuse words, or to use good words too often. We are not sure, besides, that leaking, soaking, and filtering are always applicable to sunlight, moonlight, and starlight. Surely the following lines are over-bold:—

I have seen her hardy cheek
Like a molten coral leak . . .

At first perusal we were inclined to take the verb for an odorous noun misspelled by the printer's devil. Many extraordinary uses of words we feel sure are due to rhyme. Would "a brood of ducks in waddling line" be called "a peeping hoard" if "hoard" did not chance to rhyme with "roared"? Is it not due to "bitter foam" that we have "a life of loam—That must break and fade?" Can we not surmise that "health enslaves" the "pouting cheeks" of "white-skinned spring," because an excellent verse above must end with "waves"? Do not "spar" and "spars",

"bar" and "bars" occur in and out of season because they rhyme so well with "star" and "stars"? Such questions would be impertinent if addressed to the poet. We merely jot them down because, as we read, we felt obliged to ask them of ourselves.

Let us now proceed to make a final summary of our various charges against Mr. Cawein's poetry. It is not national or Southern. It is often unindividual. It has too distinctly seen a background of books—viz.: mythology and master poets. It is often marred by laborious richness, or unrestrained exuberance—whichever it be. The poet is often too lax with himself in using words and inversions to suit his convenience, rather than to develop progressively a perfect whole. But these are all our charges. Much remains to be said in favor of Mr. Cawein. The first and best thing is, he has an eminent taste for poetry, and he is poetical in soul as well as by cultivation. Often he gives us random lines of exquisite beauty, and expressions that haunt us:—

—hair,—wild woods
Have perfumed—loops of radiance.
A graceful glimmer up the ferny lawn.
A haunt
In minnowy freshness.
O Sorrow, when the sapless world grows white,
And singing gathers up her spring-tide robes.
The cold pure spell of rain-drenched forests deep.
Wild morning-glories pale as pain
With holy urns."
Her full bosom's clamorous speechlessness.

But it is unjust to quote these, and their like than verses which offend. Who does not know that half the beauty of the beautiful line is its appearance just when wanted? How can, for instance, this last line be appreciated unless "The King" (*Moods and Memories*) has been read; and we have come to the ghastly moment when a beautiful woman's lover suddenly, in an instant of tiger jealousy, hales back her "white face"

Back, back by its large braids of plenteous hair,
Till her full bosom's clamorous speechlessness
Stiff on the moon burst bare ;

when mocking her with a low laugh, he cried :—

“The King! O thou adulteress!” and a blade
Glanced then as ice plunged hard, hard in her heart.

Less easy yet will it be to quote stanzas which can convey
to the reader our most favorable impresssion of Mr. Cawein.

The heartbreak of the hills be mine,
Of trampled twigs and mired leaf,
Of rain that sobs through thorn and pine,
An unavailing grief.
—“Last Days” (*Days and Dreams*), p. 121.

In classic beauty, cold, immaculate,
A voiceful sculpture stern and still she stands,
Upon her brow deep-chiselled love and hate,
That sorrow o'er dead roses in her hands.

We hardly think that a better picture could have been
drawn, in as few words, of Mnemosyne. And here we cannot
keep from quoting one of his shortest poems.

UNUTTERABLE.

There is a sorrow on the wind to-night
That haunteth me; she like a penitent,
Heaps on rent hairs the snow's thin ashes white,
And moans and moans, her swaying body bent.
And Superstition, gliding softly, shakes
With wasted hands, that vainly grope, and seek,
The rustling curtains; of each cranny makes
Wild, ghostly lips that, wailing, fain would speak.

Or, in a poem somewhat akin to the one just quoted—“The
Wind” (*Moods and Memories*, p. 306), could we wish to have
the following stanza improved upon?

When the puffed owl, crouched and frowsy,
In the rotten tree,
Sobs dolorous, cold and drowsy,
His shuddering melody.

And these quotations lead us to say that possibly as a
whole those poems of Mr. Cawein that made the deepest

impression, and seemed most his own as a class, were all such as dealt with the realm of latent superstitions. "The Haunted House," "In an Old Garden," "The Old House by the Mere," "The Ruined Mill," and the first two stanzas of "Hackelnberg," all in *Moods and Memories*, are very striking. There is another kind of poem in which Mr. Cawein has achieved signal success—the brief narrative or ballad. As instances we might give in *Days and Dreams* "The Mater Dolorosa" and "The Epic." Apart from the poems already admiringly mentioned we should like to commend to the reader's attention "Face to Face," perhaps the most earnest poem of all we have read by Mr. Cawein; "Yule," which is a savage, brilliant picture of Saxon days; "Avatars" with a close that commends the whole; "The Venus of the Roses" which is striking, and "A Fairy Cavalier" which is neat and pretty.

Perhaps we have failed to convey to our reader the esteem we feel for our poet. Still, we have shown this by taking his work so seriously. We have used no weapons but fair weapons; we have used them as effectively as we could, because we respect the poet and his poems. That Mr. Cawein has songs of his own to sing, we do not doubt. Perhaps we are wrong in saying that the following lines of his own apply well to himself:

— no hates and no foes
For a heart that sings but for sport,
And shifts as the song wind blows.

If we have seemed severe it is because we were disappointed, perhaps unreasonably. We wanted a living voice for the South, and at first we felt we could not expect to find it in Mr. Cawein. But is there not ample evidence in his best work that if he bent his energies fully to the task, and sang not "for sport" merely, he could be what we most need,—a keen seer to whom the hidden germs of future beauty would be evident in the crudities of the present; one who should vivify our dead material life of struggle and worry with the spirituality of beauty; one who should show

us that we can look forward confidently, that the present is very good in spite of what may seem amiss, and that the future will compensate for all disquiet and distress more amply than we, poor drudges in the lower strata, can conceive? Blow us a blast of hope, and faith; of confidence in man and in America; of belief in the masses and their elevation; of new spirituality to supplant our greed for gain; of new religion to burn out of the ashes of our segregated creeds! Blow us a blast, sweet and strong, let the trumpet be of purest metal, and be sure God's hills will furnish echoes, and the hearts of men, of fellow Southerners, Americans, toilers and doubters, will respond, and gladly acknowledge in the poet, a leader, helper, friend, a prophet and a priest.

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